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MSP 4446

Professor Lombard

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Reading Summary

Lombard, M., Lee, S., Sun, W., Xu, K., & Yang, H. (in press). Presence theory. In Cynthia Hoffner (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*. Wiley/Blackwell.

Nunez, D. (2007). A capacity limited, cognitive constructive model of virtual presence.

Dissertation. Chapter 3: A critical review of current significant models of presence, pp. 50-105

Nunez, D. (2007). A capacity limited, cognitive constructive model of virtual presence.

Dissertation. Chapter 4: The capacity limited, cognitive constructionist model of presence (CLCC), pp. 106-133

To begin to understand presence theory, Nunez (2007) discusses five problems that researchers examine in regards to presence. These problems help one better understand the different theories and how it connects to spatial and social presence. Nunez describes the book problem, the physical reality problem, the dream state problem, the virtual stimuli problem, and the inverse presence problem. I was intrigued by the inverse presence problem, because it presents an interesting perspective that people may experience real events “as if they were

mediated” rather than the other way around (Nunez, 2007, p.52). I have often heard people say after emotionally intense or traumatic experiences that “it felt like I was in a movie.”

CLCC stands for the capacity-limited, cognitive constructionist model of virtual presence (Nunez, 2007, p.106). This model focuses on the way people react to certain media through its level of presence. A main component of the CLCC model, according to Nunez (2007), is that “each subject constructs their own unique experience of an environment by applying previous knowledge of situations and by interacting with the current situation” (p.108). The cognitive constructionism component of CLCC mentions Albert Bandura, who is a social learning theorist. He contributes to the CLCC model through his idea of *reciprocal determinism* where the individual both influences and is influenced by the surrounding environment (Nunez, 2007, p.108). The subject is an active agent in the world, the subject interactively creates their experience, and the final product is meaningful to the subject are the three essential features of constructionism (Nunez, 2007, p.109).

The Lombard reading on presence theory breaks up presence into two parts: spatial and social. When mediated environments are perceived as non-mediated, then spatial presence is said to occur. The theories of spatial presence have evolved from simple models to complex ones, each building on top of each other. These different models and layers help one understand how the human brain reacts to mediated environments. An interesting point that the reading makes is that this experience is not limited to technology. When people read a book; visit a theme park; view a painting, etc. the line between the real environment and the mediated one can blur together.

In the two- pole model, users are present in both their actual and virtual space; whereas in the three- pole model users are also identified as being present in their mental imagery space.

These are both simple models that do not take into account the complexity of the processes going on in the brain during these experiences. In the focus, locus, sensus model, “presence refers to a focus on the external environment” (Lombard, p.3). Presence will rise the more a user focuses on the external environment and diminish when the attention is focused internally. Locus distinguishes between the real world and the virtual world, while sensus deals with the conscious and unconscious. The reading brought up an interesting example of language being something we need to focus on when we first learn it, and then it becomes an unconscious habit.

The reading talks about the layers of presence, which further expands upon the idea that presence is a focus on the external world. Proto, core, and extended presence create optimal presence when working together. When thinking about telepresence systems, the main goal is to reduce the user’s awareness that they are using the technology, which helps blur that line between the real and mediated world.

The reading also talks about social presence which can be described as “sights, sounds, and physical contacts between two people (or more), and is influenced by perceived intimacy and immediacy, which tend to be lower in mediated communication” (Lombard, p.6).

Theoretical frameworks for this concept include parasocial interaction; self-presence in novel bodies; and the media equation.

In parasocial interaction, users feel a relationship with someone through a mediated platform. To increase this presence, TV shows like *Blue’s Clues* will talk directly to the viewer. In self-presence in novel bodies, people may see avatars as an extension of themselves or feel a real connection with a virtual body. An example the reading talked about was how when an artificial hand touched a real person in a study, those people felt like it was another real person.

When describing media equation, it is interesting how the reading said that “though people are aware that computers are not humans, they mindlessly apply social rules to computers” (p.9).

The theory of social presence parallels spatial presence in its layers. Proto self-presence is where the user knows at a basic level that the avatar is an extension of the self; core self-presence is where a user experiences emotion when something happens to their avatar; and extended self-presence is where users believe the avatar identity is their own.

To connect all three readings together, CLCC and presence theory can help us understand the way we experience different types of media through the idea of presence. To link it to class discussion, we saw during the rough cuts for the Emergent Media video projects that the creator’s goal for the audience is to experience a certain presence. Our past knowledge and experiences help evoke a certain type of presence that may not be the same for everyone.